

Short report on our first visit to Calais – December 2014

Hi All

I went over to Emmaus St Martins, Calais with a companion, Leon on Friday 19th December. We went via the tunnel thinking this would speed up our trip. This couldn't have been further from the truth! A 3 hour wait on the inward journey and 5 hour wait homeward! A 16 hour round trip.

We arrived at Emmaus St Martins at lunch time and were greeted by Patrick (deputy community leader) as planned. We were invited to help ourselves to lunch and coffee. We took the opportunity to look round the vast site, its shops and recycling areas. For those that haven't had the experience of visiting a French Emmaus, it's well worth it. Our shiny new van attracted a lot of companion attention who were keen to shake our hands and say hello. Sometime later we were shown to the recycling warehouse, into which backed our van. As is typical with the French Emmaus's I have seen, it was a very big farm building with piles of card board, pallets, plastics and rags all sorted into different areas. We offloaded 100 pre-packed nylon string bags each filled with socks, scarf, gloves, hat and various toiletries such a tooth brushes, toothpaste, shampoo, soaps, comb, razors etc. In addition here were about 100 sleeping bags and 100 blankets along with warm clothes. All were marked up but in hindsight this should have been in French.

On the next trip we are going to add a small 'first aid' kit and a wind up torch to the pack. Apparently they are particularly keen on the torches as there have been fires in the local camp due to the use of candles.

St Martins is about 30 miles inland and there is a migrant camp just a few miles away in Tatinghem which shows just how widespread the problem has become. We have already heard that 2 independent organisations have been to pick up our goods and that St Martins have done a delivery. It looks like our efforts (thanks Village Charlton and E Enterprises) are already being felt!

During the homeward wait to get back on the tunnel train we saw a lot of migrant activity. Aside from a big camp we must have seen 100 or more young men dodging the police at various places on the 5 hour, 3 mile road to the tunnel compound. They all seemed to be dressed in warm clothing so there has obviously been a lot of help to date, which is just as well because it was dark, damp and freezing.

We witnessed several occasions when the well-armed police chased after the youths and on one occasion when caught, was beaten with a truncheon and then released! We saw many attempts to board vehicles and the arrest of 6 youths within the compound. The sheer hopelessness of it all was very evident!

We are planning to go out again at the end of January.

Tony 23.12.14

